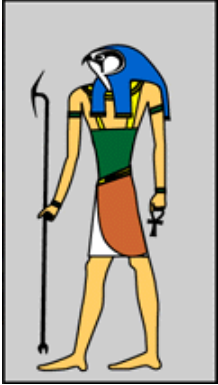


1.2 Ancient Egypt- Middle Kingdom

Station #1- Political Structures and Traditions

Central to the development of Egypt's political institutions was the concept of the **God-King**. From relatively early in the history of Ancient Egypt, the Pharaoh was believed to be the earthly embodiment of the God Horus, son of Osiris.



The ancient Egyptians had many different beliefs about the god Horus. One of the most common beliefs was that Horus was the son of Isis and Osiris. After his brother Seth murdered Osiris, Horus fought with Seth for the throne of Egypt. In this battle, Horus lost one of his eyes. The eye was restored to him and it became a symbol of protection for the ancient Egyptians. After this battle, Horus was chosen to be the ruler of the world of the living.

To deny that the Pharaoh was the embodiment of Horus on earth would be undercutting the entire structure and basis of authority of Egyptian Kings. The accepted partial divinity of the king allowed him to mediate between Gods and people, perform the religious rituals central to Egyptian beliefs, and perhaps most importantly, to remain separate from his subjects and rule with divine right.

Deriving power from the Gods ensured considerable stability since there were few challengers to the king's authority, and the word of the king was seen to be divinely inspired. Despite the appearance of absolute power, the king was expected to rule over Egypt subject to **Ma'at**.



Ma'at is pictured as a woman with an ostrich feather and was the Goddess and symbol of the equilibrium of the universe. The king was expected to govern according to the principles of Ma'at and to the precedents set by earlier Kings. Kings attempting to alter society radically would be seen as destroying the equilibrium that was so important to the tradition-bound Egyptians. This could lead to a civil war or some other challenge of authority.

1. What double role were the kings said to have?
2. Why were the Pharaoh's said to be the earthly embodiment of Horus?
3. Why was it important for the Pharaoh's to have the role of the King and a God?
4. Why was it important to derive power from the Gods?
5. Who is Ma'at?
6. Why were Pharaoh's supposed to rule subject to Ma'at?
7. What would happen if a Pharaoh did not rule by the subject of Ma'at?

1.2 Ancient Egypt- Middle Kingdom

Station #2- Succession



To ensure the purest line of succession, a Pharaoh passed on the throne to the eldest son born of the Principal Queen, or Great Royal Wife. This was usually the eldest daughter of the previous king and, therefore, the sister of the ruling king. If the king and the Great Royal Wife had no son to inherit the throne, succession would pass to the son of a secondary wife, who would then legitimize his claim to the throne by marrying the Great Royal Daughter. This would be the daughter of the king and the Principal Queen, or, if they had no daughter, the Principal Queen herself. The stepmother of the new king.

The pharaoh owned all the land of Egypt, the people, and their possessions. Any personal wealth enjoyed by the Egyptian people was considered a result of the generosity of the king. Beneath the king was a hierarchy of government officials that advised him, enforced the laws, pleased the gods, oversaw the construction of the pyramids and tombs, sought trade opportunities, and collected taxes. These civil servants were often rewarded well for their efforts, receiving grants of land and other valuable goods. Many top-ranking officials were quite wealthy and able to prepare fairly elaborate burial tombs for themselves.



Among the most important of these government officials were the scribes who recorded the deeds of the Pharaohs, real or imagined, and keep stock of all supplies. The value of the scribes is reflected in the fact that, most often, a scribe filled the role of vizier, or prime minister to the king. The vizier served several important roles. First and above all else, the viziers were the advisors to the king from whom they received their orders, and to whom they were directly responsible. Viziers were also responsible for overseeing the entire administration of government, and served as the head of the judiciary. Next to the king, the vizier was the most important government official in Egypt. Beneath the vizier, were a number of minor officials who collected taxes, supervised agriculture, and the granaries, coordinated trading expeditions, oversaw the construction of public works (including the pyramids and later tombs of the Pharaohs), managed the justice system, and supervised matters of public health.

1. Who did the Pharaoh pass his throne on to?
2. What if the Pharaoh did not have a son?
3. What did the Pharaoh own in Egypt?
4. What did the hierarchy of government officials do for the Pharaoh?
5. How were they rewarded for their work?
6. Who was the most important government official?
7. What did they record?
8. What were the roles of the vizier?
9. What were the roles of the minor officials beneath the vizier?

1.2 Ancient Egypt- Middle Kingdom

Station #3- Legal Traditions



Egyptian law, like virtually all other areas of life, was governed by religious principles. The Egyptians believed that the Gods infused law into the world at the time of creation. The goddess Ma'at personified the essential foundations of Egyptian law, which represented truth, righteousness, and justice. According to Ma'at, the goal of all people was to find and maintain the correct balance and order of the universe. This ideal seems to have been a central part of the lives of most Egyptians. They were generally a very law-abiding people, who sought harmony and stability in their lives. As the head of the court of justice, the vizier was a priest of Ma'at, as were the officials who administered the justice system.



Generally, Egyptian laws were fair and humane compared with those of other ancient civilizations. They were also applied equally to all people, regardless of class or gender. The law emphasized protecting the family- providing protection to the children and wives, who could divorce their husbands or be guaranteed compensation should their husbands divorce them. The Egyptians had no codified body of laws. Instead, their legal system was based on precedents (previous cases). Each Pharaoh strove to govern in accordance with Ma'at, and the courts ensured that the laws applied were consistent with past practices.

While the laws of Egypt were fair and equitable, the punishments could often be quite severe. Two principles seem to have guided Egyptians in determining the appropriate punishment for a crime: 1) that a severe punishment would act as a deterrent and that in some cases, 2) disgrace was more effective than death. Minor crimes were often punished with 100 lashes and forced labour in the mines and quarries. Escape attempts could lead to ears and noses being amputated. Men who raped a freeborn woman were castrated. Corrupt officials had their hands amputated, and those who released military secrets had their tongues cut out. For those who committed crimes punishable by death, there were several options for their execution. Crocodiles devoured some, those of high status were allowed to commit suicide, and children who killed their parents had pieces of their flesh cut away, were placed on beds of thorns and buried alive. Parents who killed their children were forced to hold the dead child for three days and nights. Deserters from the army were publically disgraced but could erase the humiliation by doing a courageous deed.

1. What was Egyptian law governed by? Why?
2. What goddess personified the essential foundations of law?
3. How was Egyptian law different than the laws of Early Mesopotamia?
4. How did the Egyptians make judgement on cases?
5. What are the two principles that guided the Egyptians in determining the right punishment for a crime?
6. How were the following punished?
 - a. Minor Crimes
 - b. Corrupt Officials
 - c. Escaped attempts from forced labour?
 - d. Crimes punishable by death?
 - e. Parents who killed their children?
 - f. Children who killed their parents?

1.2 Ancient Egypt- Middle Kingdom

Station #4- Economic Structure



Despite being a relatively simple economy based primarily on the annual production of staple foods, a complex system of trade developed. The Pharaoh retained absolute control over the means of production and the distribution of wealth. Egyptian prosperity and stability were dependent on abundant harvests and the ability to manage food supplies in order to survive years in which the harvests declined. The abundance of food supplies was the measure of Egypt's wealth. Full granaries, plenty of wildlife and fish, and thriving herds were the signs of prosperous times. These were images used in the tombs of the Pharaoh's to illustrate the wealth of their regions.

Any surplus of food was used for trading with neighboring peoples. An enormous amount of labor was needed to construct huge public works such as the temples, tombs, and pyramids. Everyone could be asked to contribute to Pharaoh's building projects, except for, officials, scribes, or artisans. Instead most



of the labor came from Egypt's poor; this led to a class of serfs, who although were not slaves, had little control over their own lives. Throughout nearly all of ancient Egypt, trade, both within the country and neighboring countries, was carried out through the barter system.

The widespread use of coins would not come until the time of the Romans. The Egyptians sold goods, paid loans, paid salaries and collected taxes through the exchange of goods. As trade became

increasingly complex, they developed a system of barter, which used an arbitrary standard (initially wheat), against which all goods were measured and where adjustments were necessary. Ex....a peasant wanting to purchase new pottery, might offer some dried fish in exchange. If the potter demanded slightly more for the pottery than fish, the difference could be made up with a small amount of wheat. After around 1580 BCE, the Egyptians used gold, silver, and copper as arbitrary standards.

One of the features of Ancient Egypt that contributed to the remarkable stability and continuity of the society was the passing of skilled trades from father to son. Few Egyptians explored a variety of career options. Little is known about the individual artisans, despite the numerous examples of fine sculptures, painting, and many impressive public works. Artisans did not work independently. They were part of a team in a specialized workshop. Each item was produced in the workshop by several artisans who either worked together on the piece or passed it along the line. Similar organization was used in the building of monumental structures, master planners designed and supervised the building, while skilled artisans each contributed to the project by shaping building blocks, carving sculptures or painting walls

1. What was the Egyptian economy primarily based on?
2. What was Egyptian prosperity and stability dependent on?
3. What was the sign of prosperous times for Egyptians?
4. How did we see the creation of a class system in ancient Egypt?
5. What did the Ancient Egyptians use as an early form of currency?
6. Provide an example of how trade might have worked?
7. Why is one person not able to take credit for such fine sculptures, tomb paintings or public works?